

Tui Motu

InterIslands

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The Board and editorial team of Tui Motu wish our readers and friends a peaceful and happy Christmas. May 2012 be a time when the Christian cry for justice and peace is heard and heeded.

Christmas is a special time of joy and play for children. It is also a time of vulnerability. The front cover of this Christmas issue speaks as much of the vulnerable child of Bethlehem as of New Zealand. When we realize that there are 230,000 children in poverty throughout our fair and fertile land, we affirm that the vision of peace and justice proclaimed by the Gospels is still to be realized. This vision is as ever was: the call of the prophets in every age to hope and peace — a universal vision of dignity and fairness for all — accompanied by the challenge of facing the realities of hardship and failure around us.

We know, too, that something is wrong with a political system that continues to allow New Zealand's children to suffer in this way. However, there is hope that our re-elected government, despite this

not being an election issue, will turn a compassionate face towards these most vulnerable, our children. That — at the very least — all children will gain access to free doctor's visits and full, free medical care. The ripple effects of this reform would be felt at every level of society and in the long term.

In this edition, Max Palmer points to the mystics who so often tell us more about God than many church documents. For him, the mystery of the Incarnation shows God at play from creation till now, and echoes Eckhart's simple idea: "The Father laughs for joy and the Son is born."

"Whoever truly plays is one in whom seriousness and joy are mingled." This insight from Max Palmer finds its echo in other articles. Bernard Sabella, Anna Holmes and Dorothea Stevenson show us the

ways people in other parts of our globe express the Christmas mystery of God's love for us; Ron Sharp takes our present story and relates that to the infancy narratives; while Joy Cowley searches for signs within Aotearoa New Zealand of an inclusiveness which is compassionate and caring. Jim Consedine issues a clarion call: for us to move from the saccharine, to a renewed and deeper response to the demands of the Gospel. As well, in the more serious recall of Kath Rushton's genealogical story, there is a strong element of joy given and received through finding our roots.

Throughout this Christmas, in our families and through our church celebrations, may we enjoy to the full the mystery of God's playfulness, "a game of unconstrained and overflowing love."

Come, o come, Emmanuel. ■ KT

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Christmas cover: *Maori Madonna*, painted by Bill McCormick (see explanatory box page 7)



Hiruharama, Whanganui River — Christmas Day 1885. On that day, Suzanne Aubert — Sister Mary Joseph or Meri Hohepa — made her religious profession in the Third Order Regular of Mary. This was another seminal step in her vocation journey that led to the establishment of the Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion in 1892.

Suzanne had been in New Zealand since 1860, and was still in search of the missionary and religious vocation that would enable her to live her dream of service to the poorest and most vulnerable, and in particular to the Maori population. She had lived through the devastation of the land wars, the dispossession of Maori, and the rapid changes following large scale immigration of new populations.

Writing from Rome in 1918, Suzanne would look back at the event of her religious profession and her first paddling on the Whanganui River up to Hiruharama, as one of the happiest times of her life. She recalled, “Who would believe, when we nearly capsized at Upokongaro, that 30 years later I would be in Rome, praying for a recognition from the Holy See?” She had left Auckland by ship in 1913 to ask for the approbation of her congregation, but the First World War intervened and it was not until 1920 that she arrived back in New Zealand. She lived these seven years in faith as a kind of ‘exile’ away from the people and the land she loved.

By happy coincidence, all seven of

us Aotearoa New Zealand bishops are presently in Rome on our five yearly *ad limina* visit to the Holy Father and to the Vatican church offices. At the same time, it feels like we are walking in the footsteps of Suzanne herself. We will visit the Congregation for the Causes of Saints looking for ‘a recognition’ of this great woman as New Zealand’s first saint.

If I could talk to Suzanne today, I wonder what she would like to say: I think she would remind us of the value of ‘small beginnings’, of new pastoral projects coming to birth, in poverty and uncertainty, in just the same way that Jesus came into our world at that first Christmas. From Rome, Suzanne wrote: “Let us never forget that a [small] Maori village ... was the cradle of our Institute.” She might say: hold fast to the dream of small beginnings, and work to make it a reality.

As one who was a bridge between Maori and pakeha cultures, I think Suzanne would rejoice to hold in her hands the bilingual Missal that was to be launched on the First Sunday of Advent this year. She would rejoice to hear the new settings of Maori chant for the Mass, drawing on the beauty of traditional Maori instruments and psalmody. We can look back in gratitude to her for the foundational work she did in translations, moving with ease in and out of four languages: Maori, French, English and Latin.

Suzanne brought to New Zealand her developing skills as a healer of both body and spirit. Over the years, she studied the medicinal properties of native plants and grew them to produce medicines for common ailments. Her healing skills extended to a holistic restoration of family and village relationships, to a healing of society. Looking at our country today, I wonder where she would see

the need for her gift of healing: in bridging the gap between rich and poor which causes so much suffering to families and children; in growing in respect of the cultural and religious diversity of our society and church; in continuing to promote a ‘culture of life’, a consistent ethic of life, in the face of all that erodes it.

It is just over a year since we celebrated the canonization of Saint Mary of the Cross MacKillop. We have seen what an impact that event has had on the life of the churches of Australia and New Zealand. Let us pray for the Cause of Suzanne Aubert’s canonization, that we will once again experience this new energy for evangelization:

Lord Jesus Christ, you taught us that as often as we show compassion to the least of your brothers and sisters, we show it to you.

Hear our prayers and grant that Suzanne Aubert, who supported the Maori people and devoted her life to the care of the poor, the sick and the under-privileged, will be recognized by the Church as one of your true and humble followers. Amen.

E te Kaiwhakaora, nāu te kupu tohutohu inā whai aroha mātou ki te hunga iti rawa he tonu aroha tēnā ki a koe. Whakaronga mai ki ā mātou inoinga mō Meri Hohepa Aubert kia whakaaetia e te whakaminenga o te Hahi ko ia nei tētahi o āu ākonga pono, ākonga whakaiti i whakapaua e ia tōna kaha katoa ki te hunga pōhara, ki te hunga māuiui me te ako anō i ngā whānau Māori. ■

+John Dew is the Catholic Archbishop of Wellington.

a breath of fresh air

What a breath of fresh air Bishop Colin Campbell's article (TM, Oct) was. In it he pointed out all the anomalies and inconsistencies contained in the texts of the new version of the Mass. On top of that he gave voice to the deep concerns of the laity and many priests about the new version. One wonders if the authors of the new translation know or care about these concerns. I have a sinking feeling that the disquiet expressed by so many will be totally ignored and the Church authorities will walk roughshod over all criticism in the hope that people will, in time, just give up.

Hopefully, one day, a new generation will revisit this problem and produce a text that is free from slavish adherence to direct translations of the Latin words and more in conformity with present day theological understandings.

Tony Scott, Timaru

pleased and disappointed

I was very pleased to read Bishop Colin Campbell's comments on the new liturgy (TM, Oct), but also disappointed: pleased that our Bishop was speaking out and supporting the views of the laity, but disappointed that as our Bishop he allowed the changes to be implemented in his diocese.

Under Canon Law a Diocesan Bishop "has all the ordinary, proper and immediate power required for the exercise of his pastoral office" (c.381). This is subject to any matters which the

Pope has reserved to himself or to some other ecclesiastical authority. Knowing the views of the laity entrusted to his care, I would have preferred it, if Bishop Campbell had advised The Congregation for Divine Worship that the new translation was not suitable for his diocese, or, for that matter, New Zealand. Unless the Pope had reserved the decision on the English translation of the liturgy to the Congregation for Divine Worship, Bishop Campbell would have been perfectly within his rights to refuse to adopt the new liturgy in its present form.

The second Vatican Council emphasised the importance of Bishops as successors to the Apostles, and their power in their own dioceses. Over recent years there appears to be an attempt by Rome to take back the authority of the Bishops. The occasion of adopting the new English version of the liturgy, presented a golden opportunity for the New Zealand Bishops to assert their Episcopal power, and insist on a translation that was attuned to the needs of New Zealand Catholics. The importance of the liturgy cannot be over-emphasised. "For it is through the liturgy, especially the Divine Eucharistic Sacrifice, that the work of our redemption is exercised." (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Chapter I, Article 2.) "Nevertheless the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all her power flows". (ibid, Chapter I, Article 10.)

✉ letters to the editor

We welcome comment, discussion, argument, debate. But please keep letters under 200 words. The editor reserves the right to abridge, while not changing the meaning. We do not publish anonymous letters otherwise than in exceptional circumstances. Response articles (up to a page) are welcome — but please, by negotiation.

A majority of the New Zealand Catholic laity are unhappy with parts of the new liturgy. Regrettably it was too important an issue for our Bishops to accept without dissent. With respect, they have let us and themselves down.

David More, Dunedin (abridged)

a powerful homing signal

Thank you for printing Donagh O'Shea's article on contemplation in the November issue. In earthquake-splattered Christchurch, I fell upon his words as a powerful homing signal returning me to the Good News of the Gospel on the day I learned the latest round of bad news: that our parish had been disestablished. He spoke of the essentials of contemplation as 'intimacy' and 'presence.' These are words that one can chew on and return to in these times of stress and disempowerment.

For which, much appreciation.

Sally Dunford, Lyttelton



Tui Motu
InterIslands

Tui Motu – InterIslands is an independent, Catholic, monthly magazine. It invites its readers to question, challenge and contribute to its discussion of spiritual and social issues in the light of gospel values, and in the interests of a more just and peaceful society. Inter-church and inter-faith dialogue is welcomed.

The name *Tui Motu* was given by Pa Henare Tate. It literally means "stitching the islands together...", bringing the different races and peoples and faiths together to create one Pacific people of God. Divergence of opinion is expected and will normally be published, although that does not necessarily imply editorial commitment to the viewpoint expressed.

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god born among us

Jim Consedine

Christmas is a time of huge sentiment. It is a time for gatherings, family holidays, pohutakawa flowering, beach trips, good will to all. Because it occurs in the midst of our summer holidays, people are generally more relaxed, more in the holiday mood. As such, it provides a welcome break from the rigours of the year just completed. It is a time we need to embrace and enjoy.

Christmas is also a time of consumer insanity. If ever our modern golden calf was on display, it is at this time. At every turn we are urged to buy — and buy more. This great consumer feast is evident every hour of every day — and celebrated. To visit a shopping mall is to enter into a world of frenzied activity, centered on buying things that often are obsolete by New Year. It reflects a type of cultural madness.

Therein lies a paradox. Most have taken the historical birth of Jesus — the most important event in history — and wrapped it in holiday sentiment and consumer madness.

The importance of the birth of Jesus is virtually lost. We have sentimentalised his birth to the point that it is almost unrecognizable. Is it any wonder that Christian faith has such little hold on the public consciousness? Jesus is born in among a Santa bag of presents as just another item. Most don't bother even to unwrap him!

This sentimental celebration of Christmas can cloud our understanding of Christ for the rest of our lives. Instead of Christ being understood for what he really is, he runs the risk of being seen as an ineffectual figure with some good ideas we can take or leave, not unlike a favourite uncle or aunt.

So who is this Jesus whose birth we honour? Christians believe the birth of Jesus changed the world

forever. Because of his life and teachings, a new way of being and doing things was presented. Christians are those who follow these teachings and implement them in their daily lives. They are what the Acts of the Apostles calls, no fewer than 27 times, followers of 'the Way.' That means that in many instances they do things differently from mainstream cultural practice.

This is particularly true in relation to how we treat our neighbour. Jesus, who taught a way of total non-violence, was clear about that. We are not to kill, steal from, defame, abuse or neglect our neighbour. We are to recognize that each neighbour carries a presence of the divine within. We are to treat each with respect.

I was reflecting recently with a friend as to what happens when the gospel is presented in its full modern cultural context. It makes a huge difference. For example, we can all say that 'love your neighbour' is a good thing. But place that imperative alongside the beatitudes of Jesus to 'feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned' and suddenly it can be very challenging. If I understand my neighbour to be trapped on the Horn of Africa in a refugee camp and he or she is starving, what does that say to my excess wealth about the proposed overseas holiday trip I was planning? About the new car I had my eye on? About upgrading my home? What does 'love' mean here? Jesus would be clear enough — love/justice demands we feed the hungry. But that demands sacrifice. Herein lies the crunch. How many are willing to pay the price?

Jesuit priest John Dear tells stories of preaching to numerous congregations in the US about the beatitude to be peacemakers. People are happy for him to talk about peace in generalities. They all say 'we want

peace'. But contextualize it and it becomes a different matter. Mention current US policy on the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, suggest that Jesus would demand that they bring home the troops and disarm their nuclear weapons arsenal, and all hell breaks loose. They don't want to know. Jesus also teaches, 'be peacemakers, and love your enemies'. And the last words of Jesus to his disciples on earth were, 'lay down the sword'. Radical stuff! Too hard to stomach perhaps in our modern culture? Not so for followers of Jesus.

It is not a problem confined to the US. After listening to Sunday preaching for the past 10 years both here and overseas and virtually never hearing social justice themes mentioned, I am convinced that many clergy are afraid to preach the full meaning of the Gospel. They prefer to sentimentalise it around individual spiritual issues of prayer and personal growth. Too often they ignore the bigger issues of justice, mercy and the needs of the poor. Jesus was scathing of such inadequate preaching by the Pharisees in his own time. What's different now?

It is time for us to reclaim Christmas. The birth of Jesus is far too important to leave in the hands of spin doctors in shopping malls. We can do this by living the message ourselves. The discerning question to answer here is — do we follow the prevailing cultural norms or follow Jesus?

During Advent, maybe we all need to reflect on what being a true follower of 'the Way' means today. And make a choice about it. ■

Jim Consedine is a priest of the Christchurch Diocese, and a member of the Christchurch Catholic Worker.

the inn and the stable

Joy Cowley

N*o room at the inn.* Those words are carved deep in our Christian sensibility. Over the centuries, we have imagined a heartless landlord turning away a woman in labour, and her anxious husband; but the reality was probably a bit different. It was census time, and Bethlehem would have been crowded. Inns were basic buildings, one large room with straw on the floor for bedding.

inn-dwellers

That evening, the inn would have been full of dusty, noisy travellers, some of them intoxicated, and it was certainly not a place for a woman about to give birth. So our image of the landlord changes. He is now thoughtful, caring. He takes the couple away from the crowd to a quiet place that houses his animals, and no doubt he provides bedding. Perhaps he calls his wife away from duties, to help with the birth. We are not sure. But the evidence suggests the landlord was more compassionate than heartless, and there is connection between the crowded inn and the stable where Jesus was born. For some of us, this can be seen as a metaphor for church.

encountering stable dwellers

Many of my encounters this year, have been with stable-dwellers, people who find Jesus on the fringe because they feel there is no room at the inn. Most have been Catholics: people divorced and remarried, people committed to loving same-sex relationships, women who feel they have no voice in the church. I suspect these have become so many that in some places they are the majority. A few years ago, an American Catholic paper stated that 61% of American



Catholics lived outside the sacraments. To extend the metaphor, this suggests that the stables are becoming larger than the inns.

to find middle ground

Here in New Zealand, the stable-dwellers come to retreats and prayer days. They hunger to belong, but they view the landlord as heartless, and they

feel a disconnection between their relationship with Jesus and the institutional inn. How can we demonstrate that the landlord is compassionate and caring, that the inn and the stable may seem separate but are connected and actually one territory? That kind of rhetoric doesn't work for divorced and remarried couples, or same-sex couples, who see the church as being unloving about loving. It doesn't work for women who consider the landlord deaf to the feminine voice that can't express itself with masculine language. There is a gap made by two extreme views, and the middle ground seems to be empty.

love in action

What will close that gap? The answer to any question of faith, lies with Jesus in the Gospels. As a devout Jew, Jesus' mission began to his own people, and then expanded with need. He preached to the Samaritans. The faith of the Syro-Phoenician woman resulted in his

We have the freedom to go to those who see themselves as fringe-dwellers. We can listen to their stories, respect and honour them where they are. We can allow Jesus to love them through us, and allow Jesus to love us through them.

ministering to the pagans, making his mission global. Always his concern was for the spiritual well-being of the people. What did Jesus say about same-sex relationships? Absolutely nothing. He did comment on marriage and divorce but that was in response to some curly questions from the Pharisees. It was to the Samaritan woman who'd had five husbands, that he first confided that he was the Messiah and then gifted her with the task of breaking the good news to her people.

It is Jesus who answers that voice of fear in us that makes us want to judge either the landlords, or the people dwelling on the fringe. It's his love that heals our divided thinking, and I am convinced that this is our way forward. Love in action fills the gap.

freedom to act

I believe the landlords are caring and compassionate. They do their work well, but some demands are outside their job description. It is up to the occupants of the inn, the lay people, to occupy the middle ground. We have the freedom to go to those who see themselves as fringe-dwellers. We can listen to their stories, respect and honour them where they are. We can allow Jesus to love them through us, and allow Jesus to love us through them.

This year I've experienced Jesus' love in many ways, through beautiful masses and parish functions, in ecumenical retreats and days of prayer. I've also experienced that love when writing blessings for people who want God in their civil union ceremonies, and in reading faith-journey letters from people in prison. And I have felt a healing in myself.

the gift of inclusiveness

So my Christmas present from Jesus this year has been the gift of inclusiveness. He tells me that the inn and the stable are one. ■

Joy Cowley is one of New Zealand's leading writers, and a regular contributor to Tui Motu.

OFFERING

*O God, I reach out to you
as a child reaches for its mother,
and like a child I offer you
a special gift.*

It's something unique.

*In all the history of the universe
there has never been another like it.*

*It's something of great beauty,
small and fragile, yet amazingly strong.*

It has all the colours of the rainbow,

a gift of shimmering contrasts,

and I offer it exactly as it is,

without any wrapping,

because you already know it

better than I do.

*So here it is, my God,
with all my love and gratitude,
the gift you made,
the gift you cherish,
the gift of me.*

— Joy Cowley



Front cover illustration: Where do we find the Madonna in New Zealand?



Bill McCormick is a well-known New Zealand artist who has captured our every day town and country environment. Prints of

his works appear on walls all over the country.

In 1984, he was invited to attend a gathering of the Asian Christian Art Association held in the Philippines and to bring one art work. The theme of the conference was *The Magnificat in Asia Today*.

Bill's painting was called *Maori Madonna* – this striking image of a young Maori woman with her child set against the majesty of the central North Island. The blue of her jeans blends with the colour of the road to show her identification with the land.

the inspiration of christmas

Bernard Sabella



The inspiration of Christmas is its message. As Bethlehem adorns itself with the colourful decorations that induce joy and optimism, another transformation takes place during this happy season. Hearts, so routinely worried about the daily life in these holy lands, take a breather. They are warmed by the traditional hymns sung in Arabic, native tongue of Palestinian Christians, and in other languages. Choirs from far away join local choirs in singing the Christmas message and in spreading the hope that shines from the manger. Children wear bright clothes and as they munch on local varieties of the Christmas cake, the Christmas spirit engulfs them with the satisfaction that the world cannot be any better.

a joyous motorcade

On 24 December, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, His Beatitude Fouad Twal, leaves his patriarchal seat at the Jaffa Gate of the Old City of Jerusalem at noon time. The community of Jerusalem dignitaries, women and men, hailing from the different faith groups of the city, accompany him as he makes

his way to Bethlehem. The feeling of togetherness warms people's hearts as they congratulate the Patriarch and one another on this joyful occasion. Bells of churches ring aloud as the patriarchal motorcade moves on its way.

Bethlehem is only 12 kilometres from Jerusalem. There is a separation wall that now divides the two cities, traditionally in a twinning relationship, for the one has witnessed the birth of our Lord and the second his death and resurrection. As the Patriarch's entourage approaches the Separation Wall, the gates that are closed year long are opened and the cars pass freely through them. A symbolic and yet suggestive move that reminds all of us that Christmas is the season to let down walls and to work always to challenge all forms of separation.

Christmas comes knocking at our hearts' doors every year to remind us that there is no other way but the pursuit of peace and that the essence of life is to experience it in reconciliation, love and forgiveness.

passing through the wall

Once the wall is crossed, hundreds of Bethlehemites receive the Patriarch with cheers and ululations. Ululations are special sounds, only perfected by older women, who make them on occasions of joy and community togetherness. Children hurry to get the blessing of the Patriarch as the boy scouts start playing band music. The motorcade of the Patriarch arrives at Manger Square, which is adorned with a big Christmas tree, at around two in the afternoon. The fanfare of the reception there sees official personalities headed by the Mayors of Bethlehem, Beit Sahour of the Angels' Field fame and neighbouring Beit Jala of the Roman Catholic Seminary and the many churches adorning it, formally welcoming the Patriarch. The Square is abuzz with pilgrims and locals, priests and nuns, boy and girl scouts and with young men and women waiting to perform with their respective choirs, outside the Church.



The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Fouad Twal (R) talks with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (C) during Christmas midnight mass at the Church of the Nativity in the West Bank town of Bethlehem, December 25, 2010. Photo: upi.com

midnight mass

On Christmas eve, preparations are completed for the Midnight Mass presided over by the Patriarch, with the presence of the President of the Palestinian National Authority, Mr Mahmoud Abbas, as a gesture of Muslim-Christian coexistence and good neighbourliness. The mass is attended by a combination of locals and internationals and is broadcast live worldwide. Christmas day is declared a national holiday for Muslims, Christians and all others to enjoy. On the morning of Christmas, families visit one another. Usually it is the mother or grandmother that invites all the children, their spouses and entire families to come partake of the Christmas dinner. Families exchange gifts but most importantly they sit together, warm with the spirit of Christmas and mindful that the occasion which brings them together did transform the world.

the prince of peace

During the Christmas season, we often remind one another in our greetings and exchanges that Christ is the Prince of Peace. This reminder is especially judicious since our land has been a land of conflict for countless generations. Conflict wears the human spirit down and makes one long for stability and peace. Christmas comes knocking at our hearts' doors every year to remind us that there is no other way but the pursuit of peace and that the essence of life is to experience it in reconciliation, love and forgiveness. This remains the eternal message of Christmas for us in Bethlehem and for the rest of the world. ■

Dr Bernard Sabella is a Palestinian Christian who heads the programme for Palestinian refugees for the Middle East Council of Churches.

FEEDING THE BIRDS

Little boy Baxter wants us to feed the birds.
He tells me so with just the one word

“Birds!”

He grips the bread tightly
and proceeds to break it into
ever smaller pieces.

We are in this together.
My job is to throw the bread up to the raised plateau
where the wax-eyes, sparrows and chaffinches
swoop down from the old plum tree
and what's left of the olive.

This exercise knows no end.
He breaks the bread into large pieces at first
and then, all concentration,
he breaks what's left again and again
and passes it to me very carefully for dispatch
until all the birds are fed

and we are face to face
and he is smiling at me
from beneath a tumble of unruly blond hair
and together we are trying to separate the last crumb
to make of it
two crumbs,

to make this communion
go on forever.

– Michael Fitzsimons



christmas in peru

Mary Dorothea Stevenson

*Each culture celebrates the birth of Christ in its own particular way.
Here the writer takes up some of the customs and culture
of where she lives in the highlands of Peru
and illuminates them for us.*

It was a couple of days after Christmas, our first in Peru and just four months out of language school. Our parish priest had assigned us with Peter Doyle, likewise quite recent in the country, to the fringe area of his parish of the Good Shepherd. A lady knocked and asked to have her little baby baptized. I told her about the formalities and that she and the father would have to attend two instructions first. The mother looked at me in astonishment and questioned my word. It turned out that she was talking about the figure of the baby Jesus of their family crib.

it's never too late

For Christmas night Mass, whole families arrive with the crib figures, the mysteries, distributed among the members. Big and small, the figures have to 'hear' Mass and all be back in the home to await the striking of Midnight. Then the infant is reverently placed in the prepared scenario with great reverence and plenty of tooting and firecrackers. In keeping with the underlying principle



in Peru, that it is never really too late for anything, the journey to the church for this blessing will occur for some families as late as the end of January or even close to Lent. Then the feast begins. Depending on family economics this might be a full turkey meal, otherwise at least a toast in champagne, with a wedge of Paneton, the essential bread of the feast — and of every end of year function beforehand.

huasahuasi

In Huasahuasi there was opportunity to be part of more established customs that vary from hamlet to hamlet. The crib in Peru might occupy half the church and in the Andes moss is an absolute necessity

as part of assembling the crib. Parish priest, Bob O'Rourke, took a group of youth out with him in the jeep to gather it. He was horrified to turn round and see a lad holding the ankles of a lass on the top side of an overhang so that she could pluck the prize up by its roots. Other natural adornments, such as whole punga ferns and slices of turf are there as well. Glass for a pond and ducks to sit on it along with a varied collection of nature and livestock come along also. It is amazing to see the materials that are unloaded outside the church on Christmas Eve. I remember being surprised by seeing little aeroplanes suspended over the Bethlehem area of the Jesuit Church in Lima.





As the priest processes to the crib scene to place the baby Jesus on the straw, children, in typical dress in some of the hamlets, dance up the aisle around the priest to accompany and welcome baby Jesus.

other andean customs

Novenas are a regular preparation for the more prominent feasts. At Christmas time these are often marked by the customs of the Andean area from which the particular people have come. A lovely way to get the young involved in the Christmas story is when the novena takes the form of a procession with rosary and carols around the neighbourhood, looking for accommodation for Mary and Joseph. The route is planned and people are advised of the part they are to play, so that there will be two or three neighbours who will deny Joseph a space in their house. Then at last a family happily takes them in and refreshments are offered. A lovely way to make real the only command of Jesus, that we make friends of all our neighbours.

the cross and christmas

Another custom one may encounter in rural areas such as Huasahuasi is the association of the cross with the Christmas story. Before the midnight mass groups arrive bringing the cross that all year protectively overlooks their

hamlet from a prominent hill above the village. It is very tall and at this moment denuded of all accessories. Before New Year's day mass, the designated group of villagers comes laden with flowers and a fresh winding sheet to dress their cross anew. At the end of mass the priest blesses the crosses and they are carried by the respective peoples back to their proper places to take care of the hamlet for another year. The dancing continues while the proper meal based on cabbage is prepared and once again there is the conviviality that Jesus himself loved so much.

This custom caused us to ask about its origins. We knew that the cross on the hill had replaced the marker originally in place. It honoured the local god and so reminded him to watch over them. The early missionaries would have been influential in urging the change but the when and why were lost in the mists of time. For many it was just something that they had always done.

the descent of the magi

Epiphany is important too. It is referred to as The Descent of the Magi. That is, the event celebrated



is actually the packing up of the crib. Dancing and sharing of food is once again a prominent feature. In our women's group we usually fall into congo pattern, weaving around the room and having the line stop different people by the crib each time. In such groups the members can make an offering towards the crib for next year at the same time as they select a figure to replace in the box. The staff and management of, say, the local branch of the bank could have the custom of declaring that the person who removes the last figure or perhaps the figure of the baby Jesus, must supply the sheep for next year's feast. ■

Mary Dorothea Stevenson is a Josephite sister doing pastoral work with the local people in Huasahuasi, Peru.



christmas stories for 2011

Ron Sharp

Stories tell us so much about the world and its faces of good, evil and indifference.

*Here the writer takes us deeper, and shows us
what the Christmas story means for us.*

Did you see the film *Avatar*? It was a story about corporates wanting to get hold of the rich resources amassed under the tribal lands of an alien planet. The plan was to transform several humans into the alien tribe's identity, so that they could woo the tribe into allowing their land to be mined. The plan failed when one of the 'transformed' humans became sympathetic to the plight of his adopted tribe, resulting in an horrific battle between the corporate forces and the natural species of the planet. It was a powerful story of greed versus nature. It incorporated all the issues that face humanity today: how long can we go on pursuing infinite goals in a finite world? When will the earth begin to show signs that enough is enough? Has it begun already, in climate change, polar meltdown, rising sea levels, weather extremes and disasters?

the universal treasury of story

There are thousands of stories, like *Avatar*, kept in the traditional treasuries of human cultures, all of them growing out of the mysteries of their times. Amongst them the great *taonga* of the children of Rangi and Papa, locked in the darkness of the womb, prising their parents apart so that they could experience light. The feats and tricks of Maui, slowing down the Sun, bringing fire to our ancestors and fishing up Te Ika. They all have the common purpose of rescuing their people from the oppression of stagnation,



fear and anxiety. Usually they arise as symbols of paradigm shifts in the history of a people facing mystifying questions that are calling them to make a radical change in their understanding. They herald a challenge to set out on a new beginning.

the judeo-christian heritage

In our Judeo-Christian heritage there is a bible full of stories, the greatest of which are built around disasters, like our ancestors' slavery in Egypt; their exile in Babylon and Assyria and their occupation by the Romans. How will they get their freedom to rule themselves? Here is a wealth of stories involving emptying ourselves in desert journeys, uncertain as to where we are heading. We are led by reluctant heroes, battling the even greater reluctance of their followers. Heroes, like Moses and David, were simple individuals whom the people turned

into supermen long after recognising their achievements. Hobbits are fine examples. Here in Nelson there is an elaborate memorial on the outskirts of the village of Wakefield, telling us of the impressive life of Lord Rutherford. Wakefield happened to be the place of Rutherford's birth and early years.

the age of aquarius

The late 60s and early 70s were our last awakening. TV had brought the Vietnam war into our living rooms and we saw its horrors. People took to the streets in protest. We rejoiced in the phenomenon of hippies living simply and singing flower power and 'All you need is Love'. Joan Baez, Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan were alerting us to the corruption within authorities that we had implicitly trusted. Women began to stand up for equality. New Zealanders started to call for a nuclear free country.

CARE and HART were born. The death of human domination and exploitation of the earth was giving birth to the green movement, and the euphoria of Vatican II was sweeping through the Church. A new age of Aquarius was being born.

The transformation of the *Avatar* hero brought the forces of good and evil into deadly conflict. But the Christmas transformation that God is effecting goes far deeper...

and christmas?

What has all this to do with Christmas? In the days when Jesus walked the lands of Palestine, his disciples saw him as one of them. Sure, he gave people hope, lifted their spirits in times when they were treated as weak sinners by their religious leaders and as outcasts by their colonising Roman rulers. It was not until they grew to experience that Jesus' death was not the end but the beginning of something new, that they began to experience him as risen and, what's more, in and through them. So they realised that they had to change direction from 'loss/end' to raising the world by imitating his life. They formed groups to talk about how he lived so that they could spread his way of life. They told their stories of their own personal encounters with him as they remembered or heard of them. And as they shared they developed a growing profession of faith, some of which was not historically literal but symbolic, in that it stimulated their recognition that God has never left and will never leave them on their own. They would prayerfully make links with the heroes of the Jewish bible.

about matthew and luke?

Matthew's profession of faith shows Jesus as the new Moses, the new Passover, the new judge, the epitome of the kingdom, the wisdom of Solomon, the liberation and restoration after exile. However, because the gospels were not written until 30 or 50 years after Jesus' death, no one had been present at his birth. How were they going to pass on the stories of his infancy and youth? And how can we make sense of the Matthew and Luke's infancy narratives today?

for us now?

God has been endlessly 'Annunciating the eternal word':

- There were no witnesses to the Annunciation to Mary, so the faith community of Luke borrowed Zechariah's, Joel's and Zephaniah's words, "Greetings most favoured one, the Lord is with you ... Do not be afraid. The Lord is in your midst." (Zechariah 9:9; Joel 2:21-23; Zephaniah 3:14-17 and Luke 1:28-31,49) Today the advent of information technology is proclaiming the coming of a new creation.
- In Matthew 1:23-24, Matthew's community remembers Isaiah 7:13-15: "The Lord ... will give you a sign. It is this: the virgin is with child and will soon give birth to a son, whom she will call Immanuel." Today's sign is the paradigm shift, in which humanity is realizing that our virgin planet is being raped, and that humans are becoming aware of how God is drawing us to a new interdependence, the beginnings of God's reign on earth — a second coming even.
- It is from Micah 5:1-4 that Matthew draws the importance of Bethlehem in the nativity narratives (Matthew 2:1-6). Today we have the protests of 'Israel's Summer' and Palestine's struggle to establish her place (*turangawaewae*).

- Matthew's community liked to see Jesus as the second Moses, Israel's saviour (Matthew 2:15). It has echoes of Hosea 11:1, 3-4: "When Israel was a child ... I called him out of Egypt." Today God is calling the Arab peoples to a newfound freedom from oppression.
- Matthew's story (2:16-18) of the murder of the Innocents under the despot Herod comes from Jeremiah 31:15. Today's equivalent could be the 'Occupy Wall Street' movement and 2500 cities around the world, demanding an end to corporate greed.
- The coming of the Magi from the East carrying gifts is a reminder of the coming of the Queen of Sheba to learn from the wisdom of Solomon (Matthew 2:1-2, Isaiah 60:1-6 and Psalm 72:10, 15). Now God's sun rising each day in the east enlivens all growth with its warmth.

conclusion

The transformation of the *Avatar* hero brought the forces of good and evil into deadly conflict. But the Christmas transformation that God is effecting goes far deeper. For the Kingdom of God on earth amongst people of goodwill unfolds, and the Christmas stories never cease to happen around us. ■

Ron Sharp is an organic farmer who lives in Motueka.

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god at play

Max Palmer

This article is a happy mingling of the lighthearted and the serious, and a wonderful reminder that God loves us 'at play'.

A lot of people get rigid as they get older because they think they should be 'wise'. But the child in us, the source of playfulness and joy — that's the source of all the loveliest things in life. The most creative people have this childlike facility to play.

(John Cleese, courtesy of *The Telegraph Group*, UK)

The ritual of the clenched fist and rigid look of defiance invariably follows a winning volley in GST (Grand Slam Tennis). GST is big business with no place for spontaneity, joy, merriment, happiness, laughter — the hallmarks of true play. Christmas is everything that GST is not, and infinitely more. Christmas resounds with joy in heaven, the joy of Divine Wisdom playing before the face of the creating God:

*When God established the heavens, I was there.
When God marked the foundations of the earth,
Then I was alongside, like a little child.
And I was daily God's delight,
playing always,
Rejoicing in our inhabited world, and delighting in the children of God.'*
(Proverbs, ch.8)

*Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
When the morning stars sang together,
And all the children of God shouted for joy? (Job 38)*

The whole wonder, beauty and joy of creation has all the spontaneity of a children's game. Unlike GST and all professional sport, children don't spend months practising their games; they just play, often making up their games as they play. So with God's creation. God created because God willed to create, not because God must. Creation is truly a game, the game of the Logos, whose cosmic dance on the globe of the world delights the Father. This game of creation is a playful glimpse of the life of the Trinity before time began.

Whoever truly plays is one in whom seriousness and joy are mingled.

Can we say the same of the Incarnation? Yes, absolutely, and more so, for now this God of creation has delivered Godself to our creatureliness in a manner that surpasses creation. The Incarnation is a game of unconstrained and overflowing love, while at the same time serious and full of meaning. To this self-giving by God, we humans respond with a love that is equally uncalculating and free. Whoever has caught sight of this cosmic game knows that the life of a human being is only a vanishing figure. 'We ourselves' says Maximus the Confessor, 'begotten and born like other beasts,

we who then become children and move forward from youth to the wrinkles of old age, who are like the flowers that last for a moment, and then die, and are transplanted to that other life — truly we deserve to be looked upon as a children's game, played by God.'

All play is an attempt to emulate the creator who performs this work with the divine seriousness its purpose demands, but also with the spontaneity and effortless skill of the great artist God is. Whoever truly plays is one in whom seriousness and joy are mingled. Alfred Lord Tennyson, while mourning the death of his close friend, could still see the joy of Christmas morning shining through his grief and sorrow:

*'Rise happy morn, rise holy morn,
Draw forth the cheerful day from night;
O Father, touch the east and light
The light that shone when hope was born'
(In Memoriam, canto 30)*

This happy mingling of the lighthearted and the serious is a flower that grows midway between heaven and earth, in the one who loves this bright and colourful world, yet knows it has proceeded from God, and also knows its limits. We know that even the greatest human deeds are but children's games, compared to the perfection our souls' desire, the perfection truly of God.

In all our thinking, pondering, fashioning and designing, we are

but poor imitators of the Logos, the heavenly Wisdom who plays on the earth, the co-fashioner with God who comes in swaddling clothes to delight in humanity. As Gregory Nazianzen orated at the funeral of Caesarius – ‘The life of a human being, my dear sisters and brothers, is but a fleeting moment of being alive, it is a children’s game played upon the earth ... a shadow you cannot hold, the flight of a passing bird, a ship on the sea leaving no wake.’

‘*Dum medium silentium ...*’ is the basis of many a sacred antiphon:

*‘When peaceful silence lay over all
And night was in the midst of her
course,*

*Down from the heavens, from the
royal throne*

Leapt your all-powerful Word.’

(Ws 18)

“What,’ asks Hippolytus, ‘is meant by this leaping? The Logos leapt from heaven into the womb of the Virgin, leapt from the womb of his mother on to the cross, from the cross into Hades, from Hades back on to the earth, from earth into heaven and now sits on the right of the Father; and will leap again to the earth with glory, to bring judgement.”

The child in us desires to leap and play, and the final answer to that longing is the word of The Word who became a little child — “Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.” Our God is the God of Christmas who delights in the company of little children. On the day when every tear will be wiped away, and time and GST are no more, the streets of the heavenly City of God will resound with the laughter of children, and the Ancient of Days, whose face is ever young, will never cease to say to them — *Ite et Ludite* — ‘Go and Play.’ ■

*Max Palmer is a monk of the
Cistercian Abbey, Kopua, Hawkes Bay*

FOR SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

For sour lemon sunny days – sharp and tart

For rain sweet sticky days-to

huddle-by-the-heater-and-make-hokey-pokey

For children who laugh, tumble and puppy through the house

For children who whine, fight and confetti corn chips all over the carpet

For great-grandmothers who visit and read stories the whole hour before dinner

For friends who bring a banana cake that needs to be eaten up for morning tea

For a grandma who washes breakfast, lunch, and dinner dishes

And brings in the washing before dark

For visiting cousins who wear the fairy tutu continuously night and day for five days

For visiting uncles who sleep-in continuously night and day

For beaches, beer-bottle tops on the footpath and interactive CD ROMs from the library

For ready-made pizzas, frozen fish fingers, cheese crackers and .microwaves

For paracetamol syrup that helps a new molar to be born

For Water

In a puddle

In a hose

In a river

In a cup

On the floor

Out of the bath

For Books

About dinosaurs and fossils

About Mars and Pluto

About toys that become real

About adventures, picnics and fairies

From the library that are lost

For lion costumes, botanical gardens, footpaths, tricycles and scraped knees

For after-lunch rests, duvets and bunk beds

Sleep

For school holidays

Celebrating very good lives

We are very grateful

Thank you God

Amen.

— Kaaren Mathías

I had always wanted a carved wooden crib so that we could unpack a sense of Christmas in the season of advent. I had early childhood memories of the carved wooden ones from Europe. Suddenly in 1971, I discovered I could get one.

We were living in Tanzania and I heard about a tribe of wood carvers, the Makonde, in the eastern part of Tanzania. They lived where the ebony trees grew, near the sea. They carved in black heartwood but traces of white sapwood were visible on their carvings. The skills were taught within the family, father to son. They used very coarse tools yet produced wonderful living pieces of art. In the museum in Dar es Salaam there was a whole tree carved with dozens of figures in a nativity scene.

We bought a crib. Each year our children would unpack the figures one by one, oil them carefully and put them up at the beginning of Advent. It was like a prelude to Christmas as they did not know which figure would emerge from the paper. Jesus did not, of course, arrive until Christmas night when the youngest put him in. The wise men had to travel all the way round the room on bookshelves, fireplace and mantelpiece, only arriving for twelfth night.

I will let the carver of this crib speak for himself:



“My father and grandfather were both carvers in our tribal tradition. Sometimes they carved monsters and bad and good spirits from our stories. Sometimes they carved pillars of ancestors, one sitting on top of another.

“My grandfather became a Christian and lived close to a mission run by White Fathers from France. They persuaded him to try carving the Christmas story for them. My grandfather carved the story in a big log of ebony. All the people were there — shepherds and village people with such



THIS IS THE PL LOOKIN

wonder and amazement on their faces looking up at the angels in the sky. Of course Mama Mary and Joseph were there with the baby Jesus and the three wise men, the cows and donkey. We have cows and



donkeys in our tribal area so they were no problem. A different matter about the sheep though. There are none in



PLACE YOU ARE ING FOR

Anna Holmes

Tanzania. The Fathers showed us pictures — really they look just like goats except their tails go down not up.

“As a boy I started by doing the cows, humped and skinny like the ones about us.

“Then the donkeys — our local ones have very long ears. The donkeys’ ears could be taken out, so did the cows’



horns so they wouldn’t get broken when they were sent far away.

“After that I was allowed to do the sheep — standing and lying and even one being carried.

“As I got better at carving I was allowed to do people. I started on the shepherds — they were the people I saw in the fields. One day I thought it would be good to remember some of our important people in the carvings.

“This shepherd is in the image of *Mwalimu* (the teacher) — President Nyerere. It was a bit cheeky making him blowing a trumpet, but sometimes they do, those politicians, though I have to say that *Mwalimu* didn’t. I carved the Prime Minister, Kawawa kneeling at *Mwalimu*’s feet. He wouldn’t have liked having to do that.

“The wise men I made like the men from Sudan and Arab traders in the market. I put a crown on one as the Fathers



asked me to, though I thought he should be wearing a turban.

“The angel is watching over the family. Mama Mary is quiet and peaceful like my wife and you can see Joseph just loving and caring for her. Baby Jesus is lying on a *khanga*, a piece of cloth, like the babies do here.

“You can’t see the writing on the edge of the *khanga* but it says *Hapa umefika* which means ‘This is the place you are looking for.’” ■



Photographs by John Holmes

fleshy feast

We can journey from frailty to freedom in our lives, and that progress is made, necessarily, not only in the mind but also in the body. To reach this goal, like the best dancers, we must 'swallow fire.'

Daniel O'Leary



“A flamenco dancer, lurking under the shadow, prepared for the terror of her dance. Somebody has wounded her in words, alluding to the fact that she had no fire or *duende*. She knows she has to dance her way past her limitations, and that this may destroy her forever ...

When the music starts she begins her dance, with ritual slowness. Then she stamps out the dampness from her soul. Then she stamps fire into her loins. She takes on a strange enchanted glow. With a dark tragic rage, shouting, she hurls her hungers, her doubts, her terrors and her secular prayer for more light into the spaces around her. Soon she becomes a wild unknown

force, glowing in her death, dancing from her wound, dying in her dance.”

Ben Okri wrote this story about the power of transcendence. It takes courage to dance, he said. This was the dance into another place. The dancer's body carried her from frailty to freedom. While she danced she was taken beyond herself, to the destined space she was made to move in. “We seldom try,” wrote Okri, “for that beautiful greatness brooding in the mystery of our body and blood.”

Christmas is the feast of the body: it celebrates the flesh. Yet too often we are taught to distrust bodies' beauty and wisdom. But they are the Sacrament of the Incarnation. Redemption, Resurrection, the abundant life — they are ever only real when experienced in our essential humanity. It is in our bodies that we experience heaven. And in them that God experiences earth. Tradition calls this “the dance of the Hypostatic Union in the Human One”.

And God said:

May you delight in your body.

It is my body too.

Don't you know you are my senses?

Without your body I cannot be.

Were we to believe even a whisper of that revelation, adults would gather around the crib on Christmas morn with astonished faces — astonished, as if for the first time, at the promised possibilities for their bodies and for the body of the world.

It is a blessed scene about our infancy and destiny as well as that of Jesus, a graced infancy in a graced humanity that grows more perfectly human even after our death, in the youthfulness of heaven. But not without its necessary deprivations and tears.

Indeed, after the Resurrection, the physical wounds of Jesus are ever honoured. Embodiment, even in its pain and fragility, seems to be an essential condition of divinity. Michael Simmons Roberts writes in *Food for Risen Bodies II*:

*Now on Tiberias' shores he grills
a carp and catfish breakfast on a
charcoal fire.
This is not hunger; it is resurrection:
he eats because he can, and wants to
taste the scales, the moist flakes of the sea,
to rub the salt into his wounds.*

Christmas reveals that we are all born with a divine star. Our bodies carry auras of inner loveliness. That is the meaning of the hallowed halo around the baby's sleepy head. We all have one! Its brightness does not depend on being successful at religion, on acquiring virtues and overcoming vices, on enforced beliefs and passing worthiness tests.

**The crib confronts us with
another way of understanding
what incarnate beauty looks like.
Incarnation irrevocably reveals
that God has carefully created
and tenderly blessed all people
with dignity and worthiness.**

In *Icon*, Lynn Roberts writes of an ordinary, hard-working woman. The poem ends:

*Her face is olive and her hands have pads
of calloused skin from grinding grain
for flour;
but if you concentrate, you'll see, perhaps,
through her chemise a faint transparency
which glows — as though she's swallowed fire.*

“As though she's swallowed fire” — like the flamenco dancer in her wild catharsis, like all our bodies when they fall in love with the God within them. That's the evocative language that best expresses the assumption of a receptive humanity by a hopelessly smitten divinity. “As though she's swallowed fire”. Not even the angels could say those words. Only we, who have senses.

In a delightful Advent homily 1,000 years ago, St Symeon wrote so beautifully of a lambent healing in our vulnerable bodies:

*We awaken in Christ's body as Christ awakens
our bodies.
And everything that is hurt, everything that
is maimed,
ugly, irreparably damaged, is in him
transformed,*

*recognised as whole, as lovely, and radiant
in his light.*

There is a shocking intensity about God's initial and passionate desire to possess us. At the beginning, when shaping Adam and Eve out of the new mud, God was carefully forming all our human bodies as we know and experience them, as God-made-tangible, enjoyable and lovable. And that first desire was never thwarted. Original sin is the strange resistance we carry to believing such good news.

Without the baby in the midnight crib, we would simply forget, as Richard Rohr OFM puts it, that our very DNA is divine. That DNA does not belong only to a chosen race, a people set apart. It belongs to everyone.

Christmas, therefore, asks us to name and recognise our own issues and prejudices with the human body in all its peculiarities, in its particular sexuality and ambiguity. It urges us to value and to embrace all those we recklessly label, scapegoat and sinfully diminish in our graceless ignorance and fear.

To raise our hands at anyone in our own home, to physically or spiritually abuse a child, to torture or mutilate anyone, for any reason, is to strike out at God's own face. So we learn to respect and grant justice to one another as divinely embodied people, with all our emotional differences. The crib confronts us with another way of understanding what incarnate beauty looks like. Incarnation irrevocably reveals that God has carefully created and tenderly blessed all people with dignity and worthiness. It insists that the first places at the holy altar of equality are always reserved for such special and beloved children of God.

Joseph, my brother, who had Down's syndrome (and who was once deemed unworthy to take his place at that table to make his First Holy Communion), loved dancing. Unable to speak, he sang his story in his simple steps. Like the flamenco virtuoso, like the child in the fields of Bethlehem, Joseph's free movement flowed from within his own body with its unconventional gracefulness.

And when Joseph danced delightedly around our Christmas kitchen I used to think that the Lord of the Dance was tapping his foot too, and that, at least for those few moments, there was peace on earth. ■

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broken, but still beating

This article takes up the Advent theme of the end time and new beginnings. The writer reflects on her experience of giving retreats in Christchurch after the cataclysmic earthquakes of this past year.

Margaret Silf

As the apocalyptic warnings at the end of the year give way to the Advent promises of new beginnings, I find myself wondering how these readings sound to the people around me right now, in downtown Christchurch, New Zealand. Christchurch has been shaken to its core during the past 15 months as a series of major earthquakes and aftershocks have destroyed most of the inner city, including the iconic Anglican Cathedral, and left many other buildings, in the local parlance, *munted*, which means that they may look fine from the outside, but their internal structures have become twisted and unsound.

When the earth has literally crumbled beneath your feet, how does it feel to hear Jesus' words: 'All these things you are staring at, the time will come when not a single stone will be left on another?'

I received an answer to my unspoken question from a group of people who had come aside to make a retreat, in the heart of the shattered city. As we gathered, I invited them to share what they were looking for in this time apart. One after another they spoke of a desire to 'go deeper into God,' to find a still centre amid all the upheaval, to replenish the heart from a well that no earthquake can undermine.

I recalled what others had told me of their experience of the devastation. 'When the earth breaks up beneath your feet,' they told me, 'the first thing you do is reach out, literally, to the person standing right next to you.' Strangers in supermarkets grasp you by the hand. People you have never known open their homes to you when your power, water and sewage systems have collapsed. Neighbours you barely recognise greet you with a heartfelt hug. When apocalypse strikes, it seems like the beams of the cross we reach out, because we need each other, and we reach down, because we need God.

At the end of our time together the retreatants gave me a special gift — a pendant of New Zealand greenstone, or *pounamu* (nephrite jade). *Pounamu* is found only in New Zealand's South Island, where it occurs as a direct result of the clash of tectonic plates, that forces seams of rare and delicate beauty to the earth's surface. It is birthed from the convulsions of destruction, but it is offered as a blessing, and like a blessing it may only be given, never purchased for oneself. Before offering me this gift, each person present held it for a while in a silent prayer, and as they placed it around my neck they sang a Maori blessing.



Thanks to the Christchurch City Council for permission to reprint this indicative image of the Avon River/ Ōtakaro.



Te aroha, te whakapono, me te rangimarie, tatou tatou e.

(May love, faith and peace be amongst us all)

The hands that blessed this gift had also searched for lost loved ones amid the rubble, for broken dreams that might never be rebuilt, for a future that seemed to have closed its doors on them. The voices that sang to me in Maori had also called out in the night in their search for friends and family, had lulled terrified children back to sleep, had spoken words of comfort to grieving neighbours.

When I hold my pounamu, and re-connect to the blessing-gift of these friends, it isn't hard to make the transition from apocalypse to Advent. It becomes possible to see that our worst upheavals can yield a treasure we could never have imagined. The dream that strangers can become friends, that the human heart can beat in harmony with God's heart, and that fresh buds can sprout from apparently barren trees becomes a promise we can trust because we have seen glimpses of its radiance in the love of our neighbours.

I have to say that I wasn't prepared for the scenes of devastation I encountered in Christchurch. The retreat house we had intended to use had been destroyed by the June quake. From its garden I could see across the bay to the city's once elegant skyline. Now that skyline resembles a gaunt row of broken teeth. As we drove back, skirting the cordons surrounding the inner city, something seized my attention. Alongside a half-demolished church stands a large signboard: 'Broken, but still beating! We are the heart of Christchurch.'

Not just Christchurch, but our church is broken and 'munted' in serious ways. Advent might be a

good time to remind ourselves that we are her heart, and we are still beating!

Most of us won't be celebrating Advent against such a grim backdrop. But few of us will understand the power of its promise as deeply as these people who know how to go beyond the breaking to discover the beating heart of the matter. ■

Margaret Silf is a wife, mother, international retreat director and spiritual director in the Ignatian tradition who has been giving retreats in NZ recently. She is also the author of many books and a columnist for America.

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an advent sermon 1511

The writer pinpoints a significant moment in the early life of people in the 'New World' when the signs of the times were looked at against the call of the Gospel.

Kevin Toomey

On 21 December 1511, the fourth Sunday of Advent, a memorable event occurred in the Dominican church in Santo Domingo, on the island of Hispaniola — today, the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Antonio de Montesinos, a friar, got up in the pulpit and preached what has become known as the first cry for social justice in the Americas. Dominicans had been present in the New World for just over a year, but his words stung the ears of his listeners:

“I am the voice of Christ crying out in the desert of this island ... the most shocking and dangerous voice you have ever heard. You live and die in mortal sin for the cruelty and tyranny done against these innocent peoples. With what right and by which justice do you hold these Indians in such horrible servitude? By what authority do you carry out such detestable wars against the people of these lands — people so meek and peaceful? ... Are these not human beings? Do they not have rational souls? Are you not obliged to love them as yourselves? Do you not understand this? Do you not feel this? How can you be in such a profound and lethargic slumber? Be certain that in the state in which you find yourselves you can no more be saved than ... those who lack or have no faith in Jesus Christ.”

These are startling words, and they received a startling response. Diego Colon, Columbus' son and successor, protested vigorously about Montesinos' preaching to fr. Pedro de Cordoba, the 28 year old superior of the local community. Colon was stunned at de Cordoba's response: “We are all authors of this sermon; fray Montesinos was



This statue of fr Antonio Montesinos, the gift of the Mexican government to the people of the Dominican Republic, stands at the mouth of the Santo Domingo harbour. It honours this friar's significant contribution to local history and social justice.

simply our mouthpiece, our thundering apocalyptic voice.”

setting the scene

Fr Antonio Montesinos was among the first 15 Dominicans that the Master of the Order, the famous Thomas de Vio Cajetan, sent in 1510 to help evangelize the ‘New World.’ The fact that the Master of the Order was involved in sending these friars shows how important he regarded their coming. It was just 18 years since Columbus had ‘discovered’ the lands we call the Americas.

It is quite difficult for us at five

centuries remove to recognize the significance of the ‘finding’ and opening up of the Americas. James Allison has described it like this:

“It was and is momentous ... the greatest event since the Incarnation was how it was seen by some in the 16th century. Certainly, landing on the moon has had no such effect and the discovery of penicillin has not had such universal consequences.”

Columbus' discoveries quickly meant that many European people arrived in the Caribbean, happy to become part of the conquest on behalf of the Spanish Crown, to colonize and

begin the process of the wholesale theft of the continents' resources. The Franciscans accompanied them. Other secular priests and religious orders followed. This group of Dominican friars, including Montesinos, was part of this "second wave."

By 1511, the basic mandate for priests and religious coming from Spain to the Americas was clear. They were to make Christians of the indigenous population, and to look after the Spanish colonists' and soldiers' (*conquistadores*) spiritual and pastoral needs. It was presumed that the Dominicans would fit into the religious arm of the colonization process, now running at full speed.

But they didn't. Why was that, and what was it that this first group of Dominicans saw when they arrived? To understand this we must look at what happened to the local people at the hands of the colonizers.

encomiendas system

The first colonizers had immediately found they needed cheap labour to fulfil their ambitions of exploiting the mineral and other resources they regarded as theirs by right of conquest. Columbus himself began what became known as the *encomiendas* system of supplying labour for the Spanish *conquistadores*' business endeavours. Its theory is simple. The Spanish Crown entrusted ("commended") Indian people to the local Spaniards, known as *encomenderos*. The Spaniards got the right to demand labour or tribute from the native people while the *encomenderos*, who became virtual slave owners, were obliged to provide religious teaching and protection for their Indian labourers. This was a rather unequal bargaining arrangement by any objective standard.

As the system grew, the *encomenderos* were obliged to defend the land for the King. The system was institutionalized by the first royal governor of Hispaniola, Nicholas de Ovando. The Indians were compelled to work, to be paid a daily wage and "treated as free persons for such they are, and

not as slaves," one of the terms of the royal order of 1503.

However, despite the terms of this royal order, in the first 20 years of Spanish rule there was wholesale exploitation of the Indians. Thousands of them died like flies because of the introduction of European diseases like influenza, and also because of the fact that they were unaccustomed to work in the way in which the Spaniards drove them to work. The indigenous people commonly lost heart amongst themselves. Queen Isabella of Spain, hearing of some abuses, had forced Columbus to return the first 300 Indian slaves he had brought to Spain in 1494. But because communication back and forth across the high seas to Spain was slow and spasmodic, the *encomiendas* system continued to grow unhindered.

One North American historian, Louis Hanke, has described Montesinos' sermon as "one of the great spiritual events in the history of humanity."

the preaching

It was against this tough background that Antonio Montesinos preached. These Spanish friars in his community had been well prepared for their mission through the spirit of renewal that had spread from the priory of San Esteban in Salamanca. This had given them the tools they needed to see what was happening in Hispaniola. Two things stood out in the style of their evangelization. The first was that they lived poorly among the people. Religious poverty meant that their first convent in Santo Domingo was a set of huts, made of palm branches. It was at the same time their church and studium. They had little materially (but were able to bring some theology

books), but quickly learned the truth of the situation of the local people. At the same time they learned the truth about the excesses of the *conquistadores*. The second and more important feature of their evangelical style was that they preached communally. They prepared their homilies together around a table by candle-light.

significance

One North American historian, Louis Hanke, has described Montesinos' sermon as "one of the great spiritual events in the history of humanity." The friars who prepared it with him had scrutinized the signs of the times and interpreted them in the light of the Gospel (*Gaudium et Spes*, 4). Five hundred years down the track it is important to recall this powerful sermon preached on the fourth Sunday of Advent 1511 by Antonio Montesinos, and to link it to our times.

The question raised by Montesinos still rings true: Where in New Zealand or in other parts of the world are people being treated as virtual slaves and not as human beings? Will we be the prophets who will work to change these wrongs? There are many glaring examples: our world-wide banking system that needs a thorough overhaul — witness the Occupy Wall St movement that has sprung up spontaneously in more than 2000 places all over the world; and the peoples of the third world kept poor structurally by the ever growing and impossible demands of our first world lifestyle — to name just two in which we are all involved. This Christmas Day, the feast of the incarnation, may we celebrate anew the fact that God took on a human face in a humble child. Jesus gave his life for us all, but especially for the vulnerable poor and those without champions for their human rights. What positive choices will we make to help renew our world? Viva Montesinos! ■

Kevin Toomey op is the editor of
Tui Motu

christmas expands our genealogy

The writer reflects on the inspiring new way that she has found to make important faith connections between her own family genealogical research and on how to focus more clearly on the person, life and history of Jesus.

Kathleen Rushton

According to the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard “life can only be lived forwards, but understood by looking back.” Maybe this explains my 23 year old interest in family genealogy. My research has advanced in recent times as now a contribution on a particular ancestor is my Christmas gift to family. These have been the most satisfying gifts I have ever given. Time, energy and creativity are invested. The giver and those who receive are put in touch with family origins, place and belonging.

the histens or histons?

This year's focus is my mother's Histen ancestors. Although the most elusive branch of our family, the search has yielded exciting finds. “There is someone else in there!” exclaimed the Timaru cemetery sexton as he located my great-grandfather Denis' grave. That someone else was his widowed mother, Mary whom none of my mother's generation knew had come to New Zealand. Her death certificate solved another puzzle for, as well, Mary had a daughter whose age then matched that of Lizzie Histen on the 1875 assisted immigrant files.

From meagre New Zealand records, I made profiles of Mary, her husband Patrick, Lizzie and Denis to prepare for research in Ireland. There are advantages in researching a rare surname derived most likely from an almost as rare Histon. A local phonebook listed about a dozen Histons to whom I

wrote, sent my profiles, a sketchy genealogy and photos of Denis and his family.

Those letters harvested phone calls and memorable meetings. Cousins who met rarely or had never met connected. Clusters of names scattered in my notes were linked tentatively. All came from the border of Limerick and Kerry. Lives were rooted in Catholicism. Looking at the photos, John of Kilpaddoge exclaimed “Ah, look at those Histon ears” as on another occasion did Paddy now of Cobh who was born in Adare. Names recur. Others are found only in certain family branches.

How I appreciated my guide and friend, Rosalie from Cork, who not only drove me around but found villages not named on modern maps. She is steeped in the intricacies of townlands boundaries, Irish language, Poor Law areas and could talk to locals and find openings I would have missed.

Information from computer searches of Griffith's Valuation became earthed. I stood outside 15 New Chapel St, Abbeyfeale where Patrick had lived. In the Duagh church where most likely he and Mary were married I knelt to give thanks. I trawled through National Library of Ireland micro-fiches of parish records deciphering handwriting often written in Latin. I leafed through volumes of civil registrations. Sometimes names on tombstones matched these sources.

At Christmas time, we celebrate the incarnation, the becoming

flesh among us of Jesus as one of us. We are connected to him not as distant or may-be cousins. He has a human genealogy. Yet in faith, in knowing and through relationship with him as the Risen One among us, the links are not tentative but real. He is our brother and not only are we his sisters and brothers but every human person is our sister or brother.

In the wonder and awe that gathers us and those who do not otherwise gather in our churches, before the crib and at midnight Mass we marvel at the mystery present in the simplicity and fragile humanity of the One who came among us as one of us. We are always striving to understand and to know. What can we know of Jesus?

a new guide

My guide now is Sandra Schneiders who makes four distinctions which help me unpeel the layers of what can be known or not known about Jesus. These layers are also in my search for my great-great grandparents. I know nothing of the actual or earthly Mary and Patrick Histen who most likely once walked around Abbeyfeale. There are no photos. I do not know what they looked like, the sound of their voices, their heights or weights. And there is no-one living who knew them to tell me. Likewise, the actual Jesus who was walked around Galilee cannot be known or discovered.

Is it possible for me to know the historical Mary and Patrick?

No again. This is the couple I can discover facts about from historical documents and put together what is called a literary construct. Details from her 1891 death registration tell me that Mary was widowed and had been seven years in New Zealand. This led me to the tentative conclusion that a Patrick Histon who died in 1882 was her husband. Facts, too, about where the historical Jesus lived and his crucifixion are found in the writings of first century writers such as Tacitus and Josephus.

To date, I have not found a textual Mary and Patrick for these folk did not make headlines, as a Baptist minister ancestor did. Published records of others writing about him tell of what he said and did. Perceptions are found in the grand rhetoric of his funeral eulogy. The textual Jesus is found in the written discourse of the four gospels.

Each gospel writer shaped the traditions about Jesus theologically drawing on his words and actions. Thus, the infancy stories in Matthew and Luke, each with its own genealogy, agree not in details but in their theological focus: Jesus' identity and that he sums up Israel's story.

known through faith

I know Mary and Patrick through faith. They existed and still they exist. They were babies, youngsters, a couple in love and parents. Yet, they are more than when they walked around Abbeyfeale. Now, they are my great-great-grandparents. Their DNA lives on in my body. In a similar but different way, the Jesus we know and meet today is the Christ of faith. There is, of course, continuity between the Jesus whose birth we celebrate as we kneel before the Christmas crib and the man who walked the hills of Galilee and was crucified. Yet he is more. He is the living Risen One among us.

the Jesus of faith

As a student of the Scriptures, I study the historical Jesus and the textual Jesus. The textual Jesus of the gospels mediates the Christ of faith proclaimed in the Liturgy, celebrated in the sacraments, found in prayer and in his sisters and brothers. In the mystery of Christmas, we find our humanity, our sense of place and belonging in Jesus who became human. Our genealogy expands, for every human person is our sister and our brother. The inspiring words of *Gaudium et Spes* ring anew

in our human hearts: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxiety of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their heart." (#1). ■

Kathleen Rushton RSM, a regular contributor on scriptural matters, has just returned to New Zealand after undertaking a fellowship in scripture at the Catholic University in Leuven, Belgium.

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“in the beginning was the word...”

John 1: 1-18 The Last Gospel (Christmas Day)

Kathleen Rushton

A story is told about an old king who had two sons and wanted to name one of them as his successor. In the presence of the wise ones of his realm, he summons his sons and gave each of them five pieces of silver saying: “With this money, and before night-fall, you must fill the great audience chamber of the palace. With what you fill it is your own decision.” He reasoned that this would show what each one can do.

Now the elder son went out and passed a field where workmen were cutting sugar-cane to grind in a mill. After the grinding the crushed cane was thrown to the ground. “Ah,” thought the son, “these useless husks could be used to fill my father’s audience-chamber.” He arranged with the supervisor to do just that. As evening was drawing in, he went to his father saying, “I have completed my task. There is no need to wait for my brother.” The father replied, “I shall wait as night has not yet fallen.”

The younger son arrived. The crushed sugar cane was removed. He then placed a candle in the centre of audience-chamber and lit it. Its light filled the chamber and reached into even its farthest corners. The king declared, “You will be my successor. Your brother spent his silver filling this chamber with useless waste. Without needing even one piece of silver, you have filled it completely with light. You have filled it completely with what people most need.”

light in darkness

Christmas is about what people most need: the “light [that] shines in darkness ... The Word ... The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into



The Monastery Church of San Juan de Ortega, Spain.

The photos were taken in the early evening of 11 September in the monastery church of San Juan de Ortega, began in 1152.

This church was designed so that on the equinoxes of spring (21 March) and autumn (22 September) a beam of sunlight (shown in this photo lower down the pillar) will illuminate the womb of Mary depicted above on its capital.

the world.” (Jn 1). Elsewhere, Jesus in John’s gospel declares, “I am the light of the world.” He reminds us that those walking in light do not stumble. The image of light in the story of the woman at the well who comes to Jesus at noon, the brightest time of the day, prepares us and draws us into her mission and our mission to bring the light to her and our own people. Indeed, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes clear that his hearers are to be a light for others: “You are the light of the world ... No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.” (Mt 5:14-16).

our participation in light

We participate in the Light. We give birth to the Light by lighting a candle which radiates light even in the furthest dark corners. Light highlights fruitfulness. The Light in darkness enables us to be fruitful. The theological reflection on the Light we find in John’s prologue is expressed in other ways in the narratives of fruitfulness as told in Luke: the annunciation, the visitation and the birth of Jesus. By being aware of the natural phenomena of light our experience of Jesus as the Light is enriched. As we become aware of light and fruitfulness, we become aware of the mystery of universe whose light surrounds us in constant, unobserved patterns which were known often in ancient times and are waiting to be recovered and extended by our knowledge of science today.

san juan de ortega

This was brought home to me recently by the genius of the architect of a building begun in 1152. When I was walking

the pilgrimage of the *Camino Santiago de Compostela* in Spain, I stayed a night in the albergue (hospitality centre) of the restored monastery of San Juan de Ortega. In the monastery church is a highly decorated triple Romanesque capital (top of a pillar) depicting the annunciation, the visitation and the nativity. The architect designed the church so that on 21 March and 22 September, the dates of the equinoxes in spring and autumn, the womb of Mary is illuminated by a beam of light from the sun thereby highlighting her

fruitfulness. When I was there on 11 September the area illuminated was edging upwards towards the depiction of the visitation (see photo).

advent-christmas reflection

The old king said, "With what you will fill it is your own decision." What decisions do I make? Do I fill the audience-chambers of our world with useless husks purchased by mis-spent resources? Or do I light a candle which fills the audience-chambers of our world with the freely available Light

of God made flesh among us which reaches even to the farthest corners? This Advent and Christmas, where am I called to light a candle of the Light that shines in the darkness? How am I fruitful? When the sun illuminates the womb of my life, what fruit is within? ■

Kathleen Rushton RSM, a regular contributor on scriptural matters, has just returned to New Zealand after undertaking a fellowship in scripture at the Catholic University in Leuven, Belgium.

power and passion on the moors

Jane Eyre

Director: Cary Fukunaga

Reviewer: Paul Sorrell

Despite its meticulous fidelity to period setting, this latest movie-incarnation of Charlotte Brontë's celebrated novel of mismatched love is no mere costume drama. Its quick intelligence and contemporary idiom make it instantly accessible to a twenty-first-century audience, as does its subject matter — child abuse, unbalanced power relations in society, and the quest for personal integrity and fulfillment through love.

As a universal story, it draws strongly on elements of fairy tale — the wicked stepmother (Jane's aunt), the ogreish suitor (Mr Rochester), and the fairy godmother (Mrs Fairfax, the housekeeper at Thornfield Hall) — not forgetting Jane herself, the pauper who becomes an heiress. Aware of the book as a work of its time, director Fukunaga also employs the machinery of the gothic novel — storms on the moor, forbidding castle-like interiors and, of course, the madwoman in the attic.

So much is unobtrusively good about this film — its deft manipulation of chronology, for one thing, and its dramatic use of lighting. The



dark interiors and frequent night scenes are lit by candles and firelight, fire playing an important role in the plot. Characters and settings are lit in chiaroscuro, often for dramatic effect or to give definition to individuals and relationships. The scene where a jaded Mr Rochester asks his feisty new governess to converse with him 'as an equal' as they sit beside an open fire is wonderfully electric.

The wild northern English landscape is also skilfully deployed. The scenes where Jane is seen running across the open moors serve to emphasise her confusion and isolation. I was reminded of Thomas Hardy's benighted heroines, often seen as tiny, vulnerable figures in vast natural settings — mere playthings of an indifferent Fate.

Yet the film has a firmer moral centre than Hardy could have provided. Jane is exposed to perverse or inadequate versions of Christianity at the brutal Lowood charity school

and, later, by the well-meaning but emotionally inhibited St John Rivers, but her faith, integrity and self-respect steer her past the many dangers that beset her path and enable her to offer forgiveness — that most hard-won of gifts — to those who have wronged her.

It goes without saying that Fukunaga's *Jane Eyre* is thoroughly recommended viewing. The performances, especially by Mia Wasikowska as Jane and Michael Fassbender as Edward Rochester, are nuanced, even luminous. The major theme is handled with assurance: as their relationship unfolds, Jane's awareness of the disparities of power between them and her growing love for her masterful employer are finely balanced.

The only possible reservation, expressed by the female members of my movie party, was that Mr Rochester might have been a little more dark and brooding! ■

books of 2011

Kate Doherty offers her choice of four of the best reads for 2011.

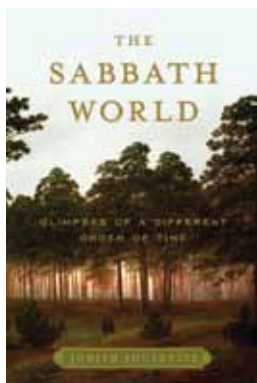
The internet is full of columnists telling us that the book, as we know it, is on the way out: digital books — ebooks — are the way to go. The paper book, they say, will soon be on a par with rotary dial telephones and reel-to-reel tape decks.

Devotees write of the convenience of hundreds of books stored on a slim electronic device. They say that they actually read more because they can call up books on this reader at will and dispose of a chapter while waiting in a queue at the airport. They point out that they can hover a cursor over a word and get a dictionary definition, instantly. They claim that ebooks are invaluable on long-haul flights.

All of which sounds very enticing — but is there anything to rival the thrill of unwrapping a new book, smelling that wonderful fresh-ink smell, enjoying the sensuous delight of a beautifully produced old-fashioned volume? The books enjoyed this year were all accessed the traditional way. I must concede though that *War and Peace* on an ebook might be less daunting — you would never feel demoralised by seeing how little progress you had made!

the sabbath world

It would be interesting to know how New York literary critic and columnist Judith Shulevitz copes with ebooks on the Sabbath. In *Sabbath World: glimpses of a different order of time* (Random House) this secular Jewish woman recounts her struggles with the Sabbath at the same time as she gives a religious, sociological and psychoanalytic interpretation of this sacred day which for many defines Judaism.



“At some point we all look for a Sabbath, whether or not that’s what we call it,” she writes. Unionists who seek to protect people from the compulsion to overwork are acknowledging one of the pillars of the Sabbath — that everyone needs time to re-create, to be free of the burden of work. But for Jewish people the Sabbath is holy, it provides not only rest but sacred, holy rest.

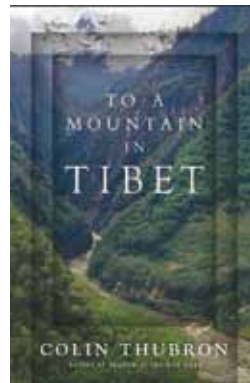
The restrictions around the Sabbath, however, caused Shulevitz to give up observing it for many years — the incredible amount of work that had to be done in the hours before the Sabbath in order to be free from work in the 24 hours from dusk on Friday night seemed to her to have no logic, and she rebelled against the constraints. Now she and her husband and their children observe some aspects of the Sabbath laws, but the practicalities of life in New York make full observance nigh-impossible: they go to synagogue on Saturday mornings but as they are forbidden to drive and their children whine about a 13-block walk, they sometimes take a taxi, which involves handling money. Eating out also involves handling money — the Sabbath laws date from a time when communities were smaller and home-centred and everyone was observant.

Shulevitz is, however, clear about the need to have space to remember what life and tradition are all about. She quotes a Rabbi who said that God stopped creating, and rested, to show us that what we create becomes meaningful only when we stop to remember why it was worth creating in the first place.

“We have to remember to stop because we have to stop to remember.” In spite of the inconveniences involved, that sounds a very attractive idea.

to a mountain in tibet

Colin Thubron has roamed over much of Asia and Europe, chronicling his travels in a series of erudite and engaging books, the first written in 1967 when he was 27. He is not a garrulous thrill seeker — his style is restrained, his encounters with people along the way, sympathetic.



His tenth book chronicling his travels, *To a Mountain in Tibet* (Chatto and Windus), starts off conventionally enough — at least for Colin Thubron. He is trekking with a guide, a cook and a horse man, starting from a remote region of Nepal, through the western Himalaya, into Tibet and to the most sacred of the world’s mountains, Mount Kailas, holy to Buddhists and Hindus — to one fifth of humanity — a mountain which has never been climbed. And then comes the question from the guide — “Why are you doing this, travelling alone?” Thubron cannot speak his answer, but he knows, and he tells the reader — “I am doing this on account of the dead.” It is the beginning of an intensely personal account of the loss of his own family, woven into a lyrical account of his pilgrimage through barren spectacular mountains on a trail followed for centuries.

Thubron’s mother, the last of his immediate family, had died not long before his trek. His father had died some time earlier, his sister had been killed in an avalanche in the Swiss Alps when she was only 21 and her brother was 19. Now, in his early 70s, that brother is walking, and remembering

them. “You cannot walk out your grief, I know, or absolve yourself of your survival, or bring anyone back. You are left only with the desire that things not be as they are.”

Every pilgrim encountered on the way has a story of why they are there, and with his characteristic skill Thubron draws out rich accounts of religious and cultural motivations for this gruelling journey. Without knowing it, many give him comfort. “The soul has no memory. The dead do not feel their past,” an old Tibetan monk tells him, and another reminds him of the Buddhist saying: “From all that he loves, man must part.”

His parents and his sister are constantly in Colin Thubron’s thoughts. A tough climb has him gasping for breath, and suddenly he is with his mother as he gives her the oxygen mask for the last time; a section of the trek takes him near to the Indian hill station where his father once hunted and he muses about the bond between his parents; finally, he addresses his sister, “I am only 19 and I am mourning, selfishly, the person you would have been for me.” It is a catharsis 50 years in the making, a book allowing us closer than ever before to one of the great travel writers.

the broken book

Fiona Farrell set out to write a book about walking too — but that was all changed by the Christchurch earthquakes. The result was *The Broken Book* (Auckland University Press) the first significant literary work to emerge from the devastation of the quakes. Last year, prompted by her editor at the Auckland University Press, Farrell happily embarked on her first non-fiction work, accounts of her walks in France — the Cevennes in the footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson (she joins a vast throng of readers appalled by his treatment of his donkey), and around Menton — Katherine Mansfield country, where in 1999 she spent a



year as the Katherine Mansfield Fellow. Walking, she comments, was calming, allowed the mind to wander, made her feel “grounded, steady, balanced on solid earth.”

The September 4 earthquake demonstrated that the earth was not at all solid, that people were not steady, that lives could be changed in an instant. February 22 confirmed it. The book about the steady, calming, meditative occupation of walking, so beloved of writers and poets for centuries, became something else. Fiona Farrell comments that it was written on either side of two major earthquakes and thousands of aftershocks. She was on her way from her Banks Peninsula home to Dunedin, where she held the 2011 Burns Fellowship, when the February earthquake struck — she turned around on the road and went home again to produce a very different book.

The essays from the French walks are wonderfully rambling, thoughtful, whimsical. There is an account of a walk to the Botanic Garden in Dunedin with a small granddaughter,

popping fuschia flowers, a tiny hand trustingly given for the road-crossing bits, so much to see and explore. The section on experiencing the earthquakes is raw and terse, the author acknowledges that she is no longer earthed or balanced. “I am instead, rattled. Unsteady. Unstable.” Twenty post-quake poems now break up the essays, just as lives were broken up, the quakes shattering the normal order of things, intruding when least expected.

on canaan's side

One of the marvels of Sebastian Barry’s new novel *On Canaan’s Side* (Faber and Faber) is that in spite of beginning with a suicide and ending with an impending suicide, and with much tragedy in

between, it is not at all a bleak book. Rather it is packed full of wisdom and understanding of the stream of life and an awareness of family, all delivered in the lyrical prose we have come to expect from this Irish writer.

The scope of the novel is huge — from Ireland in the last days of the first World War to the United States in the time of the Gulf War — but the story is very intimate and personal, related by 89 year-old Lilly Bere who lived it all. “What is the sound of a 69 year-old heart breaking?” she asks in the opening lines. Her heart has been finally broken by the suicide of her grandson Bill. The story is told in chapters numbered by the days without him. Lilly is the sister of Willie Dunne, the soldier with the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, whose life and death is told in Barry’s 2005 novel *A Long Long Way*. She is also the sister of Annie Dunne, whose story is told in the 2002 novel that bears her name.

Lilly’s life has been one of constant losses of all the men in her life — brother, lover, husband and now her grandson, mentally and spiritually broken on his return from Iraq. Her son too, a Vietnam veteran, is lost to her. Seventy years in the US has not lessened her love for her lost Ireland. Over the course of 17 days, counting from the day of her grandson’s death, Lilly remembers all the places and people she has loved: “There is never a day goes by that we don’t drink a strange cup of tea together, in some peculiar parlour-room at the back of my mind.” As is so often the case, it is the men who die while the women wait and grieve and remember. “I am dwelling on things I love ... even if a measure of tragedy is stitched into everything if you follow the thread long enough,” she writes in her old accounts ledger, seated at the kitchen table. Lilly has been affected by war after war, her memories career through her mind “like an unbroken pony.”

Sebastian Barry is a wonderful storyteller — Lilly Bere is an unforgettable character. ■



Crosscurrents

Jim Elliston

pilgrims of peace

In the 'triumphalist' mind-set of the Church of my youth, little worthwhile could be found in other religions. Decades of academic study, coupled with the pastoral experience of many missionaries, led to a revolutionary change at Vatican II. The document on non-Christian religions stated: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in non-Christian religions. She has a sincere respect for those ways of acting and living, those moral and doctrinal teachings which may differ in many respects from what she holds and teaches, but which nonetheless often reflect the brightness of that Truth which is the light of all people." (§2)

In 1986 John Paul II invited the leaders of many of the world's diverse religions to Assisi to pray for peace. Last October Benedict XVI, while taking care to avoid false impressions of unity, addressed a similar gathering. He analyzed contemporary threats to peace, and went a step further than John Paul.

First he acknowledged that religion, including Catholicism, has been a cause of violence towards both non-believers and other believers. Christians must purify their faith "from its very heart so that it truly serves as an instrument of God's peace in the world ..."

A second cause of violence arises from atheism: "... the denial of God has led to a degree of violence ... which only becomes possible when man no longer recognizes any criterion or any judge above himself, now having only himself to take as a criterion."

In a radical statement the attendance of several European agnostics was explained: "In addition to the

two phenomena of religion and anti-religion, a further basic orientation is found in the growing world of agnosticism: people to whom the gift of faith has not been given, but who are nevertheless on the lookout for truth, searching for God. Such people do not simply assert: 'There is no God.' They suffer from his absence and yet are inwardly making their way towards him, inasmuch as they seek truth and goodness. They are 'pilgrims of truth, pilgrims of peace'."

Thus they undermine the false certainty of militant atheists and also challenge the followers of religions not to consider God as their own property. Moreover, their inability to find God is partly the responsibility of believers with a limited or even falsified image of God. "We are animated by the common desire to be 'pilgrims of truth, pilgrims of peace'."

So in 50 years we move from a concept of 'Catholics versus the rest' to one that sees a broad coalition of believers moving roughly in the same direction, aided unwittingly by agnostics — quite a revolution.

salvation for whom?

During his visit to Germany in September, Benedict, while commenting on the words of Jesus "the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God," (Mt 21:31) explained: "Translated into the language of that time, the affirmation may sound more or less like this: agnostics, who on the question of God do not find peace, people who suffer because of their sins and who desire a pure heart, are closer to the kingdom of God than 'routine' faithful are, for whom the Church is only a system, but their heart remains untouched by this, by faith."

signs of hope

The world economic system is in crisis. Even China, hitherto viewed as a rock upon which the West — and NZ — could rely, is starting to look vulnerable. A sign of hope is that a significant number of those in positions of power, addicted to 'the market knows best' drug, are realising that they have a problem and are beginning to wonder what to do about it. Even the *Economist* and the World Bank have recognised that the resultant inequality destabilizes society and must be addressed.

Whatever government we will have when this is published, many, particularly the economically disadvantaged, are in for some grim times. What should the Church's priorities be?

an interesting thought

Jesus himself was seen as crazy in his day. Not just his message but him. Imagine how a shabbily dressed, itinerant preacher from a tiny backwater town in Galilee must have appeared in his day. We may be so accustomed to thinking of the Messiah, the exalted Son of God, the risen Christ in glory, that we often forget the impression that this thirty-something carpenter must have given. But if we do forget, the Gospels remind us in the starkest ways. The Gospel of Mark has Jesus' own family recoiling from his early preaching and miracle-working. "When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.'" (Mk 3:21). Both he and his message must have seemed ridiculous to many in his day." (James Martin S.J. in *America*)

May the true peace of Him whose birth we celebrate be with us all. ■

the english riots

Robert Consedine

Back in the 1960s I worked 'under the counter' in London. As part of my first OE, I lived in Earls Court and worked in Putney. Each morning I joined the one million people who boarded the underground and swelled the London city population daily. The city was magical. My political awareness was minimal.

Since then I have returned a number of times. It is never the same. I now know more.

When the late Bruce Jesson called England 'a third rate industrial slum off the coast of Europe', I initially thought he was being too harsh. Not any more. To me England now has many of the features of a slave plantation. Social control is imposed through repressive laws and a massive state security apparatus. Elections ensure that the facade of democracy is maintained. However, the old adage 'that if elections could change anything they'd make them illegal' has never been truer.

Sociologist Kevin Cahill has been uncovering 'Who Owns Britain' and the results are quite shocking.

What he revealed needs not just a riot but a revolution. These are the statistics of a third world dictatorship. The *Sunday Times* called Britain a 'banana republic'.

- 70% of land is still owned by less than 1% of the population

locked in by the vested interests of Britain's landed aristocracy. Just 6,000 landowners own 40 million acres — 2/3 of the UK. Big landholders measure their holdings by the square mile.

- The rents to the rest of the population are astronomical.
- Less than 8% of the country is developed. Agriculture only accounts for 3% of the economy.
- On average each home pays £550 (NZ\$1100) annually in council tax. Each landowning family receives £12,169 (NZ\$24,100) annually in subsidies and grants from the Government. They pay no rates.

The poor subsidise the super rich.

In 2009 the global economic crisis created by the greed and recklessness of the banks impacted. The Government response was to bail out the banks who initially received £850 billion (NZ\$17 billion) of tax-payers' money. They immediately paid their executives outrageous bonuses of up to £15 million (NZ\$30 million) each.

Who paid? Those who can least afford it. A whole raft of cost increases by Government including health and education plus an £81 billion (NZ\$162 billion) cut in Government expenditure which included an £18 billion (NZ\$36 billion) cut in welfare.

Poverty in Britain is endemic, the highest on record. 13 million people live in poverty, 30% of children live in poverty. 25% of adults live in poverty. 40% of the increase in income went to those on the highest incomes — the top tenth. The bottom tenth was zero.

How is this appalling inequality maintained?

Britain now has a vast police state network, penetrating every aspect of life which would be the envy of any dictatorship. Police, security services with unlimited budgets, courts that can penetrate the daily lives of ordinary citizens almost without limits. If any person was able to walk around London on any day they would be photographed or videoed more than 300 times.

There is always a cover story. It used to be the Russians and then the IRA. Now it's the fictitious War on Terror. The real purpose is the social control of a population and the maintenance of this vast iniquitous inequality. New Zealand is heading the same way. Ask *Tuhoe*.

An old English rhyme sums it up;

*The Law arrests the man or woman
Who steals the goose from off the common
But lets the greater villain loose
Who steals the common from the goose. ■*

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a Mother's Journal

by Kaaren Mathias

Exotic fruit. Porters. Afternoon tea companion ... Mystery. I've been thinking about God. Images of how God is for all of us. We each have our small worlds, obscured views and sensory deficits. My understanding of the Creator, Redeemer and Giver of Life needs images to help me get more of an idea of who God is.

I tried to explain feijoas to my friend Sima, last week. I described the green, rubbery skin, the white jelly and sandlike texture, and the delicate flavour. "It's kind of like pineapple, banana and guava combined — but actually altogether quite different ..." And then I gave up. "You really just need to taste it!"

As I walked up from the bus stand some weeks ago, I was very grateful for Jit Bahadur, a Nepali porter who walked up the hill with me, carrying the backpack and groceries while I carried three year old Jalori on my back. The 45 minute walk up through the narrow bazaar was more gentle and much more graceful than the days when I flounder up from the bazaar alone with heavy bags of vegetables and rice. When daily loads feel heavier than usual for me, I am so grateful for help with carrying.

God beside us.

Monsoon has just ended. It has been four months of heavy rains, moss, mould, mist, damp, ferns, flowers. The rainy season has her own verdant, virile

beauty but living among clouds for many weeks makes me feel melancholic ... the newly arrived blue, blue skies and sparkling sunshine are 100% welcome.

For our three year old, God currently is one of the inner circle of Best Friends. The two imaginary puppies and God go on all the picnics, are invited to all the birthday parties, and are served tea and cake on bright plastic plates multiple times through the day. "The puppies and God really liked the pink icing cakes I made them."

God among us.

Probably God is quite different and much bigger altogether than both Jalori and I with our small perspectives and minds can ever imagine. But I believe God is big and generous enough to feel glad to be part of Jalori's inner circle of friends, and to tolerate my limited metaphors. God who chases away the monsoon clouds with a bright blue scarf and warm gold sun; God as a porter, walking quietly beside me sharing my load; God as unknowable as a never tasted fruit; *God with and within us.*

Come, Oh come, Emmanuel. ■

Kaaren and Jeph, with their four children, live in North India and work in health and community development.

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